

By Captain Wesley Morgan, Army Community Health Nurse



The Army Nurse Corps Celebrates its 99th Anniversary

The Army Nurse Corps will celebrate its 99th anniversary on February 2nd 2000. This event acknowledges almost 100 years of dedicated service by Army Nurses to our Great Nation. Nurses have served with honor, pride, and an immeasurable commitment since the inception of the US Army Nurse Corps.

February 2nd, 1901 is the unofficial day that Congress passed the Army Reorganization Act. Nurses were appointed to the Regular Army. They were not actually commissioned; it took forty-six years before that would occur.

Nurses had been involved in caring for American soldiers long before they were recognized in 1901. The Continental Congress authorized medical support for the Army in 1744. Nurses earned \$2.00/month with one ration per day. During the Civil War, nurses worked for the Union and Confederate Armies, caring for fallen soldiers in all kinds of conditions. Clara Barton and Dorothea Dix emerged as visionaries for nursing during the Civil War. Pioneering done by these and other women in patient care and preventive medicine during the growth of this country was to have a lasting impact not only on military medical services, but civilian healthcare as well.

At the onset of the Spanish-American War, the Army faced an epidemic of typhoid fever. Congress authorized the Army to appoint nurses, under civilian contract, to help fight this enemy. Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee, Vice President of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution was given this responsibility. She recruited more than fifteen hundred nurses to serve between 1898 and 1901 in the United States, overseas and aboard the hospital ship *Relief*. Dr. McGee left her post in December 1900, but she became known as the "Founder of the Army Nurse Corps".

World War I saw the continued growth of the Nurse Corps. The first 400 nurses sailed for Europe in May 1917 to serve with the British Expeditionary Forces in France. By Armistice Day, more than 10,000 nurses had served overseas in Belgium, England, Italy and Serbia in field and mobile, evacuation, base, and convalescent hospitals. They were assigned to troop trains and transport ships. Three nurses received the Distinguished Service Medal. Thirty-eight remain overseas, buried in U.S. cemeteries.

World War II brought continued heroism, dedication and commitment to this country by Army Nurses. They served with distinction from the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the Fall of Bataan to V-E and V-J day. With the Fall of Bataan and Corregidor, 66 Army Nurses remained in the Philippines as Prisoners of War of the Japanese until February 1945. The last nurse Prisoner of War to remain on active duty with the Army Nurse Corps was LT. Col. Hattie R. Brantley, who retired on 1 February 1969.

In the 1950's, the U.S. was flung into a war in Korea. Within one year, the Army Nurse Corps had grown from 3,500 to 5,400; between 500-600 nurses served in the war zone. Army nurses supported combat troops during the amphibious attack and landing

on Inchon in Western Korea, well behind the Pusan beachhead line. No Army nurses were killed due to enemy action in Korea.

Unlike previous wars, Vietnam had no dramatic beginning-no Pearl Harbor attack, no North Korean march across a border-just a gradual escalation of U.S. involvement. Nurses went to war again. Nothing in the training or experience of military nurses could have prepared them for the casualties encountered in the Vietnam conflict. Dedication, patience, courage, and the willingness to do difficult, often dangerous tasks were the qualities most often used to describe military nurses in Southeast Asia.

In recent years, Army Nurse Corps officers have been called upon to pack their bags, kiss their loved ones, and again follow the troops into conflicts such as: Granada, Just Cause, Desert Storm, and Bosnia. Often without regard to the loss of comfort, Army Nurses stood their charges with skill, kindness and ever lasting caring, facing great danger and enduring tremendous personal sacrifices.

The sun has risen on a new millennium. Technology is being developed at speeds unfathomable just a few years ago. These changes are dramatic, dynamic, and without precedent. Changes of this magnitude have created a wealth of new opportunities for nurse leaders.

Nurse leaders must possess sharp analytical skills to envision new possibilities, and communicate within the business, policy, and clinical practice arena using the latest advanced technologies. Nurses will foster interdisciplinary teams and strengthen community partnerships. They must manage across the continuum of care so health outcomes are high quality and low cost. Nurses must be able to problem solve across geographical, organizational, and professional boundaries.

No one knows what additional challenges lay ahead. For those who are willing to accept these challenges of healthcare leadership in the new millennium...be proud to call yourself an Army Nurse Corps Officer.

The [Army Nurse Corps](#) has lived and embraced a distinguished legacy of providing compassionate care to all service members throughout history. We serve as ambassadors for this great Nation by providing humanitarian relief and aid throughout many countries worldwide. The Army Nurse Corps will lead the way as the AMEDD transitions into the next millennium.



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